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Gabbayim Workshop for Congregation Beth Shalom

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1. Introduction

Congregation Beth Shalom holds prayer services according to the halakhah of the Conservative movement in North America (United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism). A significant aspect of the halakhah is the proper leadership and delivery of the liturgy and reading of the Torah and haftarah. Each prayer service has many components, such as the Pesukei deZimra, the K'riat Sh'ma, etc., and each component requires one or more leaders to deliver the liturgy and to help the congregation participate in the service. The Torah service, which is held on Shabbat morning as well as chagim, Monday and Thursday mornings, and Shabbat mincha, is the most complex component. It is this component that requires the work of the gabbayim.

The gabbai performs his or her duties in the Torah service, and there is significant preparation involved. The gabbai does not read Torah directly, but must be very familiar with the portion. However, the gabbai must also be aware of what is happening that day in Congregation Beth Shalom. Are there people being honored? Is someone travelling to Israel? Has someone just recovered from a serious illness? Is there an upcoming marriage? The gabbai must be connected to the activities of the synagogue.

The gabbai also is the one most responsible for helping those being honored, and often these people are unfamiliar with Beth Shalom and, perhaps, with the Torah service as a whole. The gabbai shepherds these people through the service, sometimes physically, and is the welcoming face of the congregation.

The clergy at Beth Shalom are attempting to provide more resources to the gabbayim and to insure that they are prepared prior to any service. This document is a start to that preparation.

2. What is a Gabbai?

The gabbai “supervises the process of handing out the honor of being called for an aliyah. The name comes from the Hebrew word meaning ‘to collect,’ because each aliyah was once auctioned off to or otherwise purchased by the person receiving it.” At Congregation Beth Shalom, the gabbai is the religious leader who directs the movements around the bimah during the Torah service. The gabbai is responsible for insuring a proper (halakhic) reading of the Torah and haftarah. The gabbai is on the bimah during the Torah reading and controls the movement of people.

Each service has two gabbayim, a “speaking gabbai” and a “non-speaking gabbai.” The speaking gabbai has significantly more responsibility inasmuch as they actually call the olim to the bimah.

3. Tasks and Responsibilities

The gabbayim formally take direction from the mara d’atra for the synagogue, Rabbi Tobin. Ultimately, Rabbi Tobin defines what is the proper procedure and actions on any given day. However, most often the tasks are clearly defined by a) the general halakhah regarding the reading of the Torah, b) the USCJ Luach which identifies the specific idiosyncrasies of the day, and c) the honors list or Luach database as prepared by the ritual staff.

The gabbayim must be aware of the basic conditions for the Torah reading:

- There must be a minyan
- There must be a Torah reader
- There must be (valid) olim
- There must be a Torah

It is the gabbai’s responsibility to check for the presence of a minyan. On Shabbat this is rarely an issue, but for weekday readings this becomes important. At Congregation Beth Shalom, a minyan consists of 10 Jewish people above the age of bar or bat mitzvah (13 yrs or 12 ½ yrs). Both men and women count in a minyan. If the religion of the congregants is in question, the gabbai must make their best determination, and it might be appropriate to say, “Welcome to Beth Shalom. Do you count in a minyan?” There is no substitute for a Jewish person in a minyan (i.e. the Torah does not count). A minyan must be present before the Torah service begins and certainly before the Torah can be taken out of the Ark.

The gabbai should have the (first) Torah reader come to the bimah prior to the calling of the first oleh. If there are multiple readers, the gabbai should insure that they are all present prior to beginning the first aliyah.

Usually, some or all of the honors for an aliyah have been assigned prior to the service. If not, the gabbai is responsible for giving out the aliyot. This will be discussed later.

Although it seems obvious that there must be a Torah, there are instances where two Torahs are required, but there is only one in the Ark, or (commonly) there is a Torah but it is not rolled to the correct spot. It is the responsibility of the gabbai to remedy this, usually by alerting clergy to the issue. Although most readers are able to find the beginning of the aliyah, the gabbai should help where possible.

If any of the above conditions are missing, the Torah cannot be read publicly.

4. Torah Service Procedure

(The Torah Service begins on page 139 of Siddur Sim Shalom. The service, with notes is attached)

Assuming that the conditions necessary for reading the Torah are fulfilled, the gabbai asks the person or people with the honor of opening the Ark to get into position. The Ark is opened when “vay’hi binsoa haAron” is chanted: on weekdays and Shabbat mincha, the Ark is opened at the beginning of the Torah service, while on Shabbat morning this is delayed by a few verses.

After the Torah is taken out of the Ark, it should be closed. The Torah may be taken out by the gabbai, or, on Shabbat, it is often taken out by the officer on the bimah. The Torah is then handed to the person who will carry it around the sanctuary.

On weekdays, the person carrying the Torah chants “gad’lu...” followed by “I’cha Adoshem...” while on Shabbat, the Sh’ma is recited first.

When the Torah returns to the bimah, the gabbayim should take it from the one carrying it, undress the Torah, find the starting place for reading, close the Torah, place it on the reading table, and cover it. They may cover it with one of the special covers, or just the mantle that was removed.

Although Siddur Sim Shalom states that the Torah reader should chant the prayers beginning with “Av HaRachamim” and the Hadas siddur identifies the Hazzan, the gabbai (speaking) should chant the prayer. At Beth Shalom, the prayer beginning “Av HaRachamim” is rarely chanted; the gabbai will begin with “v’tigaleh...” on weekdays and “v’yaazor...” on Shabbat. These prayers should be chanted using the proper nusach, and the hazzan should be consulted for this. A recording of these prayers can be found at the website:

http://www.bethshalomkc.info/hazzan/service_resources.htm

This prayer includes the calling up of the first oleh (the person getting the first aliyah). The congregation then chants “v’atem haD’veikim...”, which is repeated by the gabbai. The gabbai then turns his or her attention to the person who has the aliyah.

5. Calling up the olim

One of the most obvious responsibilities of the speaking gabbai is the calling up of those being honored with an aliyah, the olim. Each person is called up by name, in the following manner:

Yaamod (for a male)

Taamod (for a female)

Yaamdu (for more than one person)

followed by their name (Hebrew name ben/bat father's Hebrew name and mother's Hebrew name)

followed by “la’aliyah haRishonah” (for the 1st aliyah)
“la’aliyah haShniyah” (for the 2nd aliyah)
“la’aliyah haShlishit” (for the 3rd aliyah)
“la’aliyah haR’viit” (for the 4th aliyah)
“la’aliyah haChamishit” (for the 5th aliyah)
“la’aliyah haShishit” (for the 6th aliyah)
“la’aliyah haSh’viit” (for the 7th aliyah)

“maftir”

Or maftirah

Note that the number of the aliyah agrees in gender with the word “aliyah” NOT the gender of the person getting the aliyah, except in the case of the maftir.

Orthodox congregations and many Conservative congregations reserve the first aliyah for a Kohen, the second aliyah for a Levi, and all other aliyot for “Israelites.” Beth Shalom does not assign aliyot according to the tribal designation, so one does not have to be a Kohen in order to get the first aliyah, etc. Similarly, a Kohen can be called up for any aliyah. Regardless of which aliyah the person receives, their name will always include the designation of their father if indeed he was a Kohen or Levi.

It is the responsibility of the gabbai to guide the oleh through the process of saying the blessings for the reading. The gabbai should show the person where to stand and should let them know about touching the tzitzit – or other holy object – to the Torah at the beginning of the aliyah. Then, the gabbai should point to the plastisized sheet with the blessing before reading the Torah.

Before the blessing is read, the non-speaking gabbai should announce the page number and the verse in the Etz Chayim chumash.

After the reading, the oleh should chant the blessing after the reading of the Torah. The gabbai would then begin the same process for the next aliyah.

The gabbai is responsible for insuring that the reading of the Torah is done in a halakhically acceptable manner. Thus, it is the gabbai's duty to a) make sure the reader is actually reading from the Torah scroll, b) the proper verses are being read, c) the Torah is read without error - if

errors are made they are corrected (see the section on Correcting the Reader below), d) the Torah is given honor regarding its handling.

On Shabbat, after the 7th aliyah has been completed, the gabbai should cover the Torah and ask the congregation to rise. Either the gabbai, Torah reader, or Hazzan should chant the chatzi kaddish (ideally, it is the Torah reader, but in practice it is usually the Hazzan). After the kaddish, the gabbai should tell the congregation to sit, uncover the Torah, and show the reader where to begin. Then, the maftir should be called up. Upon completion of the maftir aliyah, the gabbai should call up the person lifting and the person dressing the Torah. This can be done a number of ways, but the simplest is:

Yaamdu l'hagba'ah ul'g'lilah

Literally, (they) stand for the lifting and dressing. This avoids the need to know the genders of the one lifting and the one dressing.

6. Giving out honors

The honor of saying the blessings before and after reading the Torah (an “aliyah”) is valued in Judaism. On Shabbat morning, there are 7 aliyot, plus the maftir, while on weekdays and Shabbat mincha there are 3. The maftir aliyah is always given to the person who will be chanting the haftarah. On Shabbat, the other aliyot may or may not have been given by the Ritual Office. The gabbai has the responsibility of granting the available aliyot to congregants. This can be a difficult task for the following reasons:

- some people want an aliyah to commemorate an occasion
- some people do not want an aliyah
- there is a traditional order of precedence for the granting of aliyot
- there is often very little time to identify olim
- one is subject to accusations of favoritism or bias in their decisions

The traditional order of aliyot is identified in the attached document “Yad LaTorah.” Beth Shalom follows the order of precedence loosely, attempting where possible to give preference to those observing a *yahrzeit* or a joyous occasion. Prominent visitors can be given an aliyah, but there are often many guests and the choice is difficult. Those celebrating an *aufruf* (impending marriage) generally alert the Ritual Office in advance. Any congregant, male or female, who counts in the minyan is eligible for an aliyah. They have the option of refusing the aliyah.

On weekdays, preference is given to those observing a *yahrzeit*.

Other honors

In addition to the aliyot, other honors must be given out by the gabbai. Ark opening (and closing), lifting and dressing the Torah, and (on Shabbat) the leading of the Prayer for Peace, Prayer for Country, and Prayer for Israel must all be assigned. It should be noted that the lifting of the Torah is usually considered to be the greatest honor available in the service.

7. Correcting Torah Readers

I. Gabbai's Preparation

- To be effective, the gabba'im must be able to read Torah themselves.
- Each gabbai should look over the Torah reading and the luach beforehand to become familiar with:
 - a. which parsha we are reading that day, and the page numbers in the Etz Chayim chumash
 - b. where aliyot end
 - c. k'ri/k'tiv changes to the text
 - d. how long the reading is

II. What we correct in a Torah reading: VERSES

- we correct aliyot that end too early (e.g., when the reader prepared the wrong verses)
For weekday reading, the gabbai should either follow the Torah readings from the back pages of the Hadas siddur, which indicates the end of each aliyah; or mark up a chumash in advance.
For Shabbat readings, simply follow the aliyot indicated by the luach or provided by the hazzan
For double parshiyot, check the luach in advance, so you know which markings to follow in the chumash.
For Yom Tov, either keep a luach handy on the shulhan, or mark up a chumash to indicate where aliyot end, since they will differ from what you see in the chumash.

III. What we correct in a Torah reading: WORDS

- We correct the omission or addition of words.
- We correct when the wrong word is chanted.
- We correct k'ri/k'tiv changes.
- We correct mispronounced words that change meaning.

IV. What we correct in a Torah reading: TROP

We correct trop only if it will alter the meaning of the verse. This is usually restricted to correcting someone who confuses an etnachta [equivalent to a colon in English] with a siluq (also called sof pasuk) [equivalent to a period in English], since these indicate the beginnings and endings of phrases or sentences. Where a sentence begins or ends can radically alter its meaning.

If we sense the a reader is losing his/her grasp of the trop and this will throw him/her further off, the gabbai can supply the trop in a way that will help the

reader get back on track. This applies especially for many beginning readers who can be highly dependent upon singing the trop correctly to get the words right.

What we correct in a Torah reading: VOCAL PROJECTION

The kahal must be able to hear the reading. If someone is chanting so softly or quickly that only you can hear it, that is not a kosher reading. You should gently ask him/her to sing more loudly or slowly, as the case may be.

How we correct Torah reading

Both gabba'im (gabbai Rishon and gabbai sheini) should follow the reading closely, but one gabbai should take responsibility for being the 'designated driver' for correcting the reader (e.g. should take primary responsibility for this.) It is far easier for a reader to follow one voice than two.

The gabbai must repeat the correction until the reader chants the word or phrase correctly.

The corrections should be spoken by the gabbai loudly enough for the Torah reader to hear it, but not so loudly that the kahal will hear it. Our goal is to balance the need for an accurate reading with the positive value of not embarrassing a person in public.

Swift and sensitive correction by the gabba'im assures the kahal that errors will be addressed promptly. This should prevent members of the kahal from yelling out corrections, which can be very unsettling for the Torah reader, and everyone else. Corrections should be stated in a way that will elicit the best and quickest possibly adjustment from the Torah reader.

If a reader does not take a correction well or at all, you must use your judgment on the spot. If the reading is so bad that it is not a kosher reading, hopefully there will be someone in the room who can take over. Such situations are extremely rare.

Beth Shalom Policy on Mispronunciation in Torah Reading

Examples of word mispronunciation we would correct:

INCORRECT VOWELS THAT CHANGE MEANING

The word 'isha' (wife) and the word 'isheh' (fire offering) are spelled with the same consonants in Hebrew, aleph-shin-hei, but use different vowels to express radically different meanings! They cannot be substituted for each other!

One category of vowel error that must be corrected is when the vav hahipuch is

mispronounced. This vav has the function of changing the tense in biblical Hebrew. When vav has a patah under it, but is pronounced with a schwa, or vice versa, it should be corrected.

Examples of word mispronunciation we would NOT correct:

THE PAUSAL FORM

The use of the pausal form does not alter meaning; it simply makes the rhythm of the sentence flow better. An example would be the word 'yeshu'atehcha' (with a segol) is simply the pausal form of 'yeshu'at'cha'. Said correctly, the trop fits the words, and the flow of the phrases is far easier, but said incorrectly it does not alter meaning. It should be pointed out to the reader afterwards.

ERRORS IT IS IMPRACTICAL TO CORRECT DURING A READING

There are mispronunciations we do not correct on the spot for the purely practical reason that it is nearly impossible to communicate them quickly and in a quasi-whisper. They should be pointed out to the reader afterwards.

We do not correct putting the stress on the wrong syllable, unless it distorts the word.
We do not correct the pronunciation of a kamatz katan as a regular kamatz (unless the meaning of the word is changed (e.g. ozi vs azi)
We do not correct the omission of the mapik in the letter hei.

8. Preparation

Technical Preparation: Luach and Torah

The gabbai's job cannot be done properly without regular advance preparation. It is the responsibility of each gabbai to read the USCJ Luach the week before their day on duty, and to clarify questions in advance with the clergy. It is not sufficient to read the luach during the service! Note that the luach can be found on the synagogue website, divided by the Hebrew months. The honors list will contain any special blessings that should be recited on the day, but will generally not be available far in advance.

Gabba'im must be fluent in the recitation of certain prayers such as the Torah service. Each step of that brief but complex service, if insecure, adds time to the overall service and adds up to a tircha d'tzibbur, a burden to the community. The Hazzan is more than happy to teach/coach this portion of the service.

Gabba'im must be sufficiently knowledgeable Torah readers to know how and when to correct a reader. Guidelines can be found in a later section. However, part of the gabbai's preparation should be some familiarity with that week's parasha. Even a single reading will help with corrections and eliminate possible confusion.

9. Resources

Attached is the Torah Service from Siddur Sim Shalom and Excerpts from Yad LaTorah.